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THE PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS TOWARD DRINKING AND DRIVING Highlights from the 1991 and 1993 National Surveys

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) administered its first national survey (N=2,406) to assess the public's attitudes, perceptions and behaviors toward drinking and driving in 1991. A second nationwide survey (N=4,010), using the same basic instrument was administered in 1993, and current plans call for continuing to obtain updated data at least every other year. The purpose of these surveys is to enable NHTSA to track change in attitudes and behaviors toward drinking and driving, and thereby provide data needed to guide programmatic activity directed at the drinking and driving problem. These surveys are designed to tell us where progress has been made, where improvements are still needed, and the nature of the remaining problems for drinking drivers.

Two broad categories of individuals are of primary interest in these surveys: 1) The *general driving age public*, because their views influence the nature and extent of efforts to change the

behavior of drinking drivers; and 2) the subpopulation of *drinking drivers*, because these individuals place themselves and others directly at risk.

The general driving age public is defined as individuals 16 and over residing in the United States. However, comparisons between the 1991 and 1993 surveys are limited to the 16-64 age range common to both surveys. All differences between the surveys reported below have less than 1 chance in 20 of occurring by chance ($p=.05$), except as noted. For the 1991 and 1993 surveys, the maximum expected sampling errors at the 95% confidence intervals are $\pm 2.00\%$ and $\pm 1.55\%$, respectively.

General Views toward Drinking and Driving

Eighty three percent of the public in 1993 said that drinking and driving by others is a "major threat". This is unchanged from 1991.

Support for doing something to reduce drinking and

driving declined slightly; 91% said it was "very important" in 1991 versus 87% in 1993.

Those agreeing that people should not be allowed to drive if they have been drinking any alcohol at all has also declined slightly from 1991 to 1993, (77% versus 73%).

Views toward Enforcement

Forty three percent of the general public stated that current enforcement of Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) laws was "too little", while about half said current enforcement in their community was about right. Only 4% regarded current levels of enforcement of drinking and driving as excessive. Almost three quarters (71%) thought that penalties for DWI should be more severe. These proportions changed proportion is about the same as in 1991. However, when drinking drivers were asked how likely it is they would be charged if stopped after driving with too much to drink, 76% were either "almost certain" or "very likely" of being charged in 1991, compared to 71% in 1993. The probability of this difference having occurred by chance is about 1 in 4.

Drinking drivers' expectations regarding the likelihood of being punished if charged with DWI have remained about the same from 1991 to 1993. In 1993, 82% said punishment is either "almost certain" or "very likely". Expectations of a severe punishment, if imposed, for drinking and driving, showed an increase from 21% to 30%.

Self Reports of Behavior

The proportion of the general public reporting driving after drinking in the past 12 months was 28%, and the proportion reporting driving after consuming too much alcohol to drive safely was 7% in both 1991 and 1993. The proportion of the general public reporting riding with an impaired driver was about 15% 1993 and is also unchanged from the 1991 survey.

very little from the 1991 survey.

In the 1993 survey, several questions on Sobriety Checkpoints were asked for the first time. Eighty-four percent of the general public favored sobriety checkpoints and 63% said they should be used more frequently. About 10% of the public has been through a checkpoint in the past year.

Expectations of Drinking and Driving Consequences (data for drinking drivers only)

In 1993, 19% of drinking drivers said they were either "almost certain", or "very likely" to be stopped by police for driving after drinking too much. This

In both 1991 and 1993 about 93% of drinking drivers report having done something to avoid drinking and driving. However, the frequency with which specific methods for avoiding driving decreased. The most often mentioned action, asking someone else for a ride, declined from 71% to 66%. Other avoidance actions that changed were: designate a driver (69% to 62%); and stay overnight as a guest (63% to 57%).

When out with friends who had too much to drink, the most frequently mentioned action that could be taken was to drive them home. Seventy three percent identified this action in 1991 while 64% mentioned it

in 1993. Other frequently reported choices in both surveys were taking their keys (29% and 33%) and getting someone else to drive them home (18% and 17%).

Conclusions

In general, the changes in attitudes and behaviors occurring between the 1991 and 1993 surveys are small. The proportion of the public (age 16-64) that drives after drinking, and those who placed themselves at risk by riding with an impaired driver, held fairly constant from 1991 to 1993.

The public's concern about drinking and driving remains high, although there is a small decline from 1991 to 1993 in the public's view of the importance of doing something about the problem. Nevertheless, the public supports more severe

penalties, and strongly favors the use of sobriety checkpoints.

NHTSA will continue to monitor drinking and driving attitudes and behaviors to ensure that the slippage in the use of specific avoidance behaviors is not the first sign of a more widespread problem. This is one of several *TRAFFIC TECHS* on these data.

For a copy of ***National Survey of Drinking and Driving Attitudes and Behavior: 1993***, prepared by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, (COTR Paul J. Tremont, Ph.D.) contact Office of Program Development and Evaluation, NHTSA, NTS-32, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590, (202) 366-2752, or send a fax to (202) 366-7096. The datasets for the 1991 and 1993 surveys are available through NTIS (Order Number PB 95501755).

U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W. NTS-33
Washington, DC 20590

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Linda Cosgrove, Ph.D., Editor, Evaluation Staff
Traffic Safety Programs
(202) 366-2759

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